

## Korean “comfort women” in Koza camp in Okinawa

Annotation Source: Seoul Metropolitan Archive

Annotation and Image Link: <https://archives.seoul.go.kr/item/110>

Okinawa Prefecture, commonly referred to as Okinawa, is located in the southwestern tip of Japan and is made up of over 100 islands, including the main island of Okinawa, which is home to the largest population. It was since March 1944 when major Japanese forces began to be stationed in Okinawa. In February 1944, when U.S. troops attacked Truk Island in Micronesia and Guam, Saipan, and Tinian in the Mariana Islands, feeling pressured, the Japanese military created the Okinawan Defensive Forces, the 32nd Army, to defend the southwestern side of the Japanese mainland. Accordingly, in 1944, at the end of the war, more than 100,000 Japanese troops gathered in Okinawa from Manchuria and mainland Japan. Since soldiers who had already used “comfort stations” in China moved to Okinawa, the Japanese military decided that they needed “comfort women” for the soldiers, and started to mobilize “comfort women” by creating “comfort stations” in various locations in Okinawa. As a result, more than 100 “comfort stations” were built in Okinawa from 1944 until the end of the war in 1945.

In March 1945, a full swing battle began in Okinawa between the U.S. forces and the Japanese forces. On March 22, 1945, the U.S. forces began attacking Okinawa, starting with the Kerama Islands (Tokashiki Island, Zamami Island, and Akashi Island), and made their way into the main island of Okinawa on April 1, 1945 from Yomitan, the central Okinawa, and occupied the northern and southern regions. This battle, which lasted for about three months, until June 23, when the Japanese military's resistance collapsed, was the only long-term battle that took place in Japanese territory during the Pacific War (the surrender was signed on September 7th), with the death toll that reached 200,000. The civilian casualties were enormous: more than 94,000 lives lost were of civilians, and about 180,000 deaths, including local defense personnel, reached one-third of the total population of Okinawa, and more than 280,000 residents were detained in camps. It was because Okinawa was the strategic location for the Japanese military in building a breakwater to prevent the U.S. troops from landing on the mainland, as well as for the U.S. forces in securing a bridgehead for the offensive into the Japanese mainland.

This is a photograph attached to the U.S. military administration activity report in November 1945 that depicts Korean “comfort women” waiting to return from the Koza camp in Okinawa to Korea. The photographer is unknown. At the bottom of the photo, there is an explanation that says, “Korean “comfort women,” who were brought to Okinawa by the Japanese military, gathered at the Koza camp and await their return to Korea in November. These women were one of the problems that troubled the U.S. military government from the time they were brought to Okinawa until they returned to their homeland.”

This view is also apparent in the report attached to the photo. The U.S. military points out in the military government report that one issue related to the public safety is the Korean “comfort women” left by the Japanese military in Okinawa, and that 40 Korean “comfort women” from various parts of Okinawa gathered at Koza camps to return to Korea, and the 110 additional women from the rest of the Ryuku Islands are waiting for their return to Korea. The U.S. military and U.S. military government that began to control Okinawa since the occupation seem to have considered the Korean “comfort women” as a threat to public safety, local health conditions, as well as to their rule of Okinawa that they and seem to have prioritized the return of these women to Korea.

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